

BRINGING THE LIGHT TO PACKEY

Continued from page 8

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Barstow. I got ten, and I was supposed to pay him back a dollar and a half a week for twenty weeks. But after about ten weeks I fell behind and couldn't catch up. So he lent me twenty-five to pay the other notes off, and I've been giving him two and a half a week on the twenty-five—that was to be for twenty weeks too. But I got in the hole again after ten or eleven weeks, and he let me have fifty to take up those notes.

"Fifty dollars!" she exclaimed. "Packey! What on earth were you thinking of? How did you expect to pay him?"

"I don't know—he said he'd go to Larrimer's and put in a claim against my salary," the boy moaned. "He had me pretty near dippy—letters and telephone messages every time I turned around. A week ago he began nagging me for money right away—he had to have it, he said. I was away behind and giving him a couple of dollars now and then when I could spare it. And then he came down on me for thirty-five this week or he'd go to Larrimer's cashier—and I knew that would be the finish for me. So—so I held out enough to pay him and leave me a ten-spot in my pocket. I know I was a fool—"

WE'LL admit that part of it, Packey, to save time," she said briskly. "There's only one more thing I want to know. You said you expected to put this forty-five back before the end of the week. What sort of magic were you going to work to pull off a stunt like that?"

Packey looked at her sheepishly. Now that the worst of his revelations were over, he was recovering something of his usual poise. After all, the heavens had not yet fallen, and there seemed to be a chance that they would be propped up for him.

"Well, if nothing else turned up, I was going to get another fifty from Barstow," he explained. "I've got a promise of another raise the first of the month—Danish is going to boost me to fifteen, and you see I could slip Barstow a week out of that—"

"Yes, for about two weeks," Miss McMullen interrupted. "Then your languing lady friends and your athletic club would be pinning more coin out of you every week, and the big lamp would come a month or so later on. You got a bad start, Son. What you needed was somebody to throw a switch in front of you and keep you on the main track away back there when you borrowed that first ten from Friend Barstow—or maybe before that. If you had owned up to Mama when you got your swell little two-dollar raise, there wouldn't have been any temptation to put over all these rinkum tinkums that you've been going through."

"I know it," he muttered; "but that's all too late now. I took the money, and they've found it out. The only thing for me is to beat it. I've got my plans all laid to get away tonight."

"But you won't do any such fool thing," she said. "We'd have a grand chance to keep this from your mother if you tried that trick, wouldn't we? You're going to stay right here in town and be low for a day or two until you hear from me."

"You mean—you mean you're going to the front for me?" he quavered. "Oh, Birdie, would you?"

"I've flagged the copper with the warrant in his pocket," she returned. "I guess I can squander enough time on you to see if this can be squared. But I'm doing it for your mother, Packey—don't forget that. And if you get out of this and still have the tango fever, pick out ten-cent dances for awhile. Goodnight, Packey."

SHE swung away from him with the jaunty step that was so well known to Halsted street, and at the first corner Andy Larkin was standing unobtrusively in a doorway as she passed.

"Well, I see you found him," he called to her.

She stopped short. "Oh, you were watching, eh? Well, Cap Collier, you keep off the grass for a couple of days," she said. "And if time hangs on your hands, run around and have a chat with Mrs. Dwyer. It'll do you good."

"Mrs. Dwyer?" he repeated in surprise. "Why, does she know—?"

"Not a thing. And she makes the best apple pie you ever ate, and she thinks you're a pretty fine-looking man."

Larkin reached for his mustache instinctively. "You're kidding!" he ventured; but he smiled with satisfaction.

"You go up and see for yourself, Andy.

You're wasting time," Miss McMullen assured him, and before he could frame a retort she was gone in the crowd.

MR. HENRY BARSTOW (salary loans on your personal note and without notifying your employer; all transactions strictly confidential) was sitting in his grimy little office above Alderman Schultz's saloon the next morning, like a particularly lean and hungry-looking spider waiting for its matutinal fly, when Miss Birdie McMullen obeyed the instruction on his door, "Walk In." Barstow was quite alone. His business was of such a nature that his clients preferred privacy to the last degree, and he did not permit himself even the luxury of a stenographer. He rose with what he intended for an affable smile of welcome, cracking his bony knuckles in salute.

"Good morning," he purred. "Something in the way of a loan?"

"Not exactly," Birdie replied, leaning on the edge of his desk and looking him over with a coldly critical stare that was decidedly disconcerting; "something in the way of a little free information. I have a friend who has been doing business with you the last six months or so,—young Dewey, a collector at Larrimer's. How much money do your books show he owes you?"

The loan shark's affable manner had vanished at the first words of his visitor. He scented trouble, and as he was thoroughly used to it his lines of defense began to go up.

"What have you got to do with the business affairs of my clients?" he demanded in turn. "Doesn't it strike you as a little bit nervy to walk into my office and ask me a question like that?"

"Oh, I guess I'm a little bit nervy, all right," she returned. "Some people along Halsted street here would probably tell you I'm worse than that. My name is McMullen—Birdie McMullen. You may have heard of me."

"Well, and suppose I have?" Barstow rejoined.

"That's just by way of introduction," Birdie said. "If you don't happen to like anything I say, you'll know who to blame it on. Now if you'll just sit down again and look pleasant, Mr. Barstow, I'm going to tell you a few hard-boiled facts that ought to do you a lot of good. You got this young kid into your spider's web here sometime ago with a little ten-dollar loan—and you made him sign notes at fifteen per cent a month, and pay a lot of 'em off. That's one hundred and eighty per cent a year, you know—just a mere hundred and seventy-four per cent, more than the legal rate."

"Say, if you came here to make trouble," Barstow began.

"I sure did, and I'm going to mix all kinds of it for you!" Miss McMullen calmly retorted. "You may have thought you jumped into trouble before in your career as a hold-up man; but you'll find it was like the gentle prattling of a babe in arms if you don't sit right and listen to what I'm going to tell you and then do just what I say!"

HE dropped back in his chair, staring angrily. The self-possessed young woman who had invaded his office went blithely on.

"You won't tell me what you pretend Packey Dwyer owes you? All right, I know enough about it to go right along. He doesn't owe you a dollar—not a cent! You've collected from him all you ever advanced him five times over, and you still have him tied up with your bum notes and salary assignment and all that junk. But here's what you're going to do, Brother Barstow: You're going to give him back that thirty-five dollars you jimmied out of him this week, and you're going to hand me all of his notes and everything else you hold against him—right now, before I leave here!"

Barstow leaped to his feet. "You're crazy!" he shouted. "You ought to be locked up!"

"All right," Birdie replied, reaching for the telephone beside her on the desk, "let me telephone for an ambulance to take me away some place."

She called a number and waited.

"Alderman Schultz?" she said into the receiver after a few moments. "Is that you, Alderman? This is Miss McMullen. Yes, I'd like to see you for a minute—right upstairs over your place—in Barstow's office. Yes, it's quite important. I'll be waiting."

She replaced the instrument and turned to the spattering loan agent.

"What are you calling the Alderman here for?" he demanded. "I want you to leave my office! I have nothing more to say to you!"

"Yes; but I've got a lot of conversation